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ABSTRACT

This issue of the Yazigi Institute's bimonthly newsletter is devoted to a discussion of the importance of humor in the teaching and learning of a foreign language. It begins with several quotations from well-known linguists, humorists and teachers about the need for humor in the language class. Several examples of humor in the textbooks of the "Let's Have Fun" series are presented. This series of English as a second language texts was first published in 1971 by the Yazigi Institute. A list of references concludes the newsletter. (PMP)

Creativity
New ideas in language teaching
Yázigi Yázigi Yázigi

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HUMO(U)R, A NEGLECTED FEATURE IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING.

F. Gomes de Matos

Humor has long been a neglected feature in foreign language teaching. In his comprehensive, well-documented history of FLT, Kelly devotes two paragraphs to the elusive but nevertheless important role of humor in language teaching. That author mentions the name of the great Dutch humanist Erasmus (1466-1536), as one of the practical pioneers in the motivational use of humor in the classroom during the Renaissance. In contemporary times, according to Kelly, the late British methodologist Michael West (well known for his manifold works in English as a foreign language) pointed out that "a vivid, dramatic, or amusing situation was a powerful aid to memory". (p. 13, op. cit). We could mention another distinguished British methodologist, W. R. Lee, who comments on how to vitalize the language-learning-and-teaching process:

"There is no reason why language teaching should be a long-faced, solemn affair. There should be plenty of laughter and excitement, for these can help learning to go with a swing. The over-serious teacher who cannot unbend, especially in miming and acting out dialogues and simple stories, and who cannot have fun with his pupils, is faced with a much harder task than one who can. Quick and slightly comical sketches on the board (very simple ones) can also give life to language."

In Kelly's book mention is made of Gerald Fleming, a British applied linguist who teaches at the University of Surrey, for his pioneering attempt at exploring the role of humor in his **Visual Grammar of French**[1].

In a now celebrated article[2], Fleming stresses the fact that humor is a vital ingredient in communication. He advocates the use of what he calls "mellow humor" and comments:

"mellow humour should be a significant element of the content of language-teaching aids."

In spite of the above references and quotations, it is somewhat surprising to recognize the fact that humor is still a very much neglected feature in the learning-teaching of foreign languages. One would not have to go through many so-called methodology manuals to realize that that quality or characteristic is simply not given specific attention or not even mentioned at all. The subject of humor seems to be neglected partly because of its rather elusive nature. It has hardly been touched upon by specialists in descriptive linguistics. Crystal and Davy, two British linguists, have this to say about humor in their excellent treatment of English style[3]:

"Humour is essentially different from other varieties (of language), being fundamentally unspecifiable linguistically." (p. 78). They add that "humour introduces a number of descriptive problems which our theory in its present form cannot handle." (p. 79, op. cit).

Has humor been re-discovered?

It seems that humor as a component, an ingredient, or a feature of language learning-and-teaching has been rediscovered in the present decade. Examples can be given of this still incipient pedagogical trend.

The publication, in December 1971, of LET'S HAVE FUN — a pedagogical-humorous approach to English for Brazilian High School Students.

This is a series (3 Books, Teachers Manuals, posters, filmstrips, cassettes and records) prepared for Brazilian schools by the Centro de Linguística Aplicada of the Instituto de Idiomas Yázigi in São Paulo. LHF capitalizes on the assumption that **Learning English as a foreign language can and should be both productive and FUN.**

The appearance in Belgium, of a pocket book entitled **Apprendre l'anglais par la bande dessinée**[4], and in England, of a five-book series called **Cartoons for Students of English**[5]. Canada also joined the fashionable trend by giving us **Amusettes**[6], a book containing 20 amusing stories. The Belgium book claims "Incroyable mais vrai, on peut apprendre l'anglais... sans l'etudier, tout en s'amusant." (p. 5, op. cit); whereas the British booklets are advertised in their backcover as a series which "presents cartoons graded in terms of language difficulty and in levels of sophistication."

The Canadian authors, on the other hand, state that "L'ensemble est tissé d'humeur à la fois simple et charmant. Vous aurez une classe agréable mais qui apprendra". (Préface)

Samples of humor in textbooks

The importance of humor as an integral feature of a teaching-learning program in English as a foreign language for Brazilian high school students (the Program is referred to as Projeto Yázigi para Ensino de Inglês no 1.° e 2.° Graus, or simply as the Let's Have Fun Project), led the Instituto de Idiomas Yázigi (headquarters in São Paulo) to entrust its Center for Applied Linguistics with the task of preparing a set of materials based on a pedagogical-humorous approach. To have an idea of the treatment of humor in that Program, especially "visual humor" (humor conveyed predominantly by illustrations rather than by text), readers of Creativity should examine the materials: an alternative would be the presentation, in this article, of samples of humor from Yázigi-produced materials. The latter procedure will be adopted here, for obvious reasons.

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Samples from LHF (Book One, Part A)

ZIP'S BREAKFAST

Dick — Zip has breakfast in bed.
Nina — Why? Is he rich?
Dick — No, he isn't.
Pepita — You see... he sleeps in the kitchen.
Note: the above humorous dialogue is visualized, that is, there are four color illustrations corresponding to the characters' utterances.

MR. PEP'S SUPERSTITION

1 Mr. Pep and Zip are walking. They're going down the street.
2 They want to go to a bookstore. It's around the corner.
3 There's something in the way. It's a big ladder.
4 Mr. Pep never walks under a ladder. He's superstitious.
5 Zip's standing under the ladder. He's making fun of Mr. Pep.
6 Mr. Pep's going around the ladder. He's afraid.
7 A car is passing by. It's splashing mud all over Mr. Pep's suit.
8 Zip's sorry. He's giving his handkerchief to Mr. Pep.
Note: the above text is part of a "visualized composition" having 8 color illustrations.

HAVING FUN

Two jokes featured in the section HAVING FUN (LHF, Book II):
Oh, doctor, I'm sorry to be so late!
Doesn't your watch tell you the time?
Oh, no. I have to look at it.

What are we having for lunch?
Oh, lots of things.
Good! What are they?
Beans!

Samples from JCCE

NEVER MAKE FACES!

1 Mark's riding his bicycle. He's riding on the sidewalk.
2 He sees a girl. She's across the street.
3 His right eye is closed. He's making faces.
4 The girl has a big dog. The girl is crossing the street.
5 Mark leaves his bicycle on the floor. He runs away.
6 Mark's running away. The dog wants to catch him.
Note: the above text is from Book II, Junior Course of Conversational English, Yazigi Method, a course for preadolescents.

JOKE (a play on words)

Soldiers are always tired on April first.
Why?
Because they have 31 days of March.

Humor, Sense of humor and the good-humored teacher

What is humor? Acoording to the **Random House Dictionary of the English Language** humor consists principally in the recognition and expression of incongruities or peculiaries present in a situation or character. It is frequently used to illustrate some fundamental absurdity in human nature or conduct. Humor may, of course, mean different things such as (a) a state of mind and (b) something laughable or comic. The true nature of humor has always puzzled philosophers and psychologists.

Among the latter, the name of Arthur Koestler stands out as a particularly insightful student of the subject of humor and laughter. His classic book **The Act of Creation**[9] has a 25-page chapter on the "logic of laughter and a 23-page chapter on Varieties of Humour. Koestler's attempt at analyzing a joke in terms of three criteria — "originality", "emphasis", and "economy" — is both revealing and entertaining. Readers who would like to read something about humor in Portuguese might do well to start with **O Riso e o Cômico.**[10].

Sense of humor is, perhaps, too difficult or almost impossible to define, but good-humor, according to some dictionaries, means a cheerful or amiable mood. Being a good-humored [illegible] then, whould mean teaching and showing a cheerful, pleasant and amiable mood.

A sense of humor and a sense of fun; these are badly needed traits in every teacher's personality. **To make his students' learning an enjoyable, while productive experience,** here is a challenge which teachers everywhere face. It is significant that in the present decade, when informal education and student-centered approaches are being more and more emphasized, some attention in being given to humor at the service of learners of foreign languages.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

1 Kelly, L. G. **25 Centuries of Language Teaching.** Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House Publishers, 1969.
2 Lee, W. R. **Teacher's Companion to The Dolphin Course.** London: Oxford University Press, 1970.
3 Fleming, G. **A Visual Grammar of French.** London: the Macmillan Co. 1969.
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8 Steckman, M. and Nancy Skiarew. **Amusettes.** Montréal: Centre Educatif et Culturel Inc. 1973.
9 Kestler, A. **The act of creation.** Revised Danube Editon. London: Pan Books Ltd. 1971.
10 Revista de Cultura Vozes, n.º 1, 1974.

Announcement - **4th International Congress of Applied Linguistics**
Where ? University of Stuttgart, Federal Republic of Germany
When ? August 25-30, 1975
Information ? Write to Detlev Riebicke, AILA Congress
7 Stuttgart 50, Hallschlag, F. R. Germany

Nina — Why? Is he rich?
Dick — No, he isn't.
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